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A L E C T U R E,
ON THE
TOPOGRAPHY AND HISTORY
OF
NEW-YORK.

BY HORATIO SEYMOUR.

UTICA, N. Y.
D. C. GROVE, PRINTER, DAILY OBSERVER OFFICE, 113 GENESEE STREET.
1856.

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LECTURE.

To understand the history of New York, it must be considered in connexion with the geographical and topographical aspects of the State. The conditions of every people are affected by the position and character of the country they occupy. Like Antæus, they must trust to the Earth for the support of their strength or the renewal of their vigor, when exhausted by the struggles of war, or the fluctuations of commerce. The physical peculiarities of this State have an unusual influence over its fortunes. They are enduring causes of its greatness and power. They have in the past, and they will in the future, affect the course of events in our country.

The history of New York has been unjustly neglected. We have overlooked the evidences of virtue, wisdom and patriotism which its annals afford. The people of this State have not been inspired with the veneration due to its founders. An indifference to national history, has ever been deemed an indication of national decay, for it implies an insensibility to honorable events and patriotic actions. The Bible

counts it among the virtues of a people, to remember with reverence the counsels and deeds of their fathers. It makes such piety, one of the guarantees of continued prosperity.

Local histories, although of less dignity and importance, are of great value. They preserve the memory of humble events, which throw light upon manners and customs and the condition of society. They also invest familiar scenes about us with continued interest. If it is wise to gain wealth with care and toil, that we may adorn our houses with paintings or statuary, and draw around us objects which gratify our tastes, surely it is most unwise not to store our minds with the knowledge which renders the hills and plains and rocks and floods around us objects of animating associations and memories.

My subject partakes of the character of both general and local history. It concerns events of humble origin which have grown into mighty existing influences; as well as marked occurrences, which at all times have excited general interest.

In my efforts to present a sketch of New York within the narrow limits of a lecture, I am embarrassed with the multitude of facts and considerations associated with its first settlements, its wars, its legislative and constitutional progress, and its advancement in commerce and the arts of life. Much has been written about New York. Valuable contributions have been made to our stores of knowledge with regard to it, but the history is yet to be written, which from the collected mass of materials, shall ex-

tract the philosophy of its events and present a just conception of our State.

I shall only attempt to rough-sketch its physical outlines, and consider them in connexion with the prominent points of its History.

The Hudson River, Lake George, and Lake Champlain, lie in a narrow and rugged valley reaching from the Bay of New York to the St. Lawrence. This is intersected at right angles, about midway, by the valley of the Mohawk. These deep channels constitute the great base lines of our State. Its triangular form corresponds with their courses. They demand a particular description, for they are intimately connected with the history of New York. They have been the war paths of savage bands and of disciplined armies. They are the scenes of the most interesting and important occurrences in the history of the state and nation. They create our commanding and peculiar relationship with other sections of our country.

The harbor of New York, with its accessory bays, its connexion with Long Island Sound, its confluent rivers and its different passages to the Atlantic, excites the admiration of all who study its wonderful adjustments. From this bay you float up the Hudson, past the cliffs of the Palisades, to the rocky fastnesses of the Highlands. Here, every analogy of Nature leads you to look for rocky barriers, but you are borne by the Atlantic tide a hundred miles beyond the mountain chain which elsewhere divides the valley of the Mississippi from the Atlantic coast. Nothing can be more impressive than the Ocean's deep and sullen ebb and flow far down among the great foundations of those stern grey

heights. They stand as if arrested here when pressing upon the river current, while, north and south, they stretch far away in unbroken chains to the St. Lawrence or the Gulf of Mexico. Elsewhere, rivers dash down the steep sides of the Alleghanies; but where these crowd upon the Hudson, they are cleft sheer down to their very roots. An enduring gateway is made through stern portals for ships of war, for vessels deeply laden with commerce, and for iron tracks upon which swift engines drag long trains of cars at the foot of rude cliffs, or through tunnels which pierce their granite buttresses. Ranged for many miles along both banks of the Hudson, had the Alleghanies thrown a single spur across its stream, how would it have changed the course of events in our land! Impressed with this unbroken ocean current through the Highlands, the observant Indian called it "the river of the mountains." Continuing up its valley, we find lying in its northern depression, separated from the waters of the Hudson by a short portage, the wild and picturesque Lake George and Lake Champlain. From the Bay of New York to the waters of the St. Lawrence, this great valley divides the eastern part of our state and all of New England from the rest of our confederacy. In its whole length, its wild scenery accords with its striking legends. Its lower section, along the Hudson, was the strong hold of our country in the Revolutionary struggle. It was the fortress of our liberties. Its rocky points, its mountain heights, its deep ravines, are associated with the history of the war for Independence. There is hardly a spot which does not bear the marks of invading assaults or of the

intrenched defences of our armies. The waters in the upper valley, which flow to the north, are still more deeply tinged with blood, and have wilder and older traditions of savage contests and of disciplined war. No other part of our continent has witnessed so much of relentless war, of bloody massacres and of fierce battles, as have startled the echoes of its beautiful lakes, and disturbed their wonted quiet and repose.

The Mohawk, which intersects this valley, is intimately associated with it in historical interest and geographical importance. I speak of this valley, with its extensions to Oswego and Western New York. In passing up its banks from its confluence with the Hudson, we find that it also breaks through one of the ranges of the Alleghanies. In the county of Oneida, it flows through level lands, which, expanding as they stretch away to the west, are at length merged in the great plain of the Mississippi valley. At Rome, the waters of the Mohawk, when swollen by floods, mingle with those which flow into Lake Ontario. These physical peculiarities of the valleys of the Hudson and Mohawk produce remarkable results. Not only are the waters of the harbor of New York and the St. Lawrence connected by the valley I have described, but, turning up the Mohawk, the light canoe of the savage hunter could float into the tributaries of Lake Ontario, and making a portage around the falls of Niagara, continue on its way through Green Bay, the Fox and Wisconsin rivers, into the Mississippi, and thence up the Missouri into the very gorges of the Rocky Mountains: a distance, by the course of the streams, of more than four

thousand miles. The entire length of the same route can now be traversed by a vessel of burthen by the aid of artificial channels. But a single mile separates the head waters of the Missouri from those of the Columbia river. From the mouth of that stream on the Pacific to the Bay of New York, with the exception of this one mile, there is an unbroken silver chain of water. The hand of the Almighty foretold the destruction of one power in letters of fire upon the walls of its palaces. Has it not written across this broad continent, in a long line of rivers, lakes and floods, that we, who are bound together by this wonderful channel of commerce, should remain one people living under one government? The courses of the Hudson and Mohawk, deeply grooved into the surface of our State, thus give us the control of the commerce between the twenty thousand miles of navigation on the lakes and rivers of the West, and the Atlantic Ocean and the maritime world at the East.

But to show more clearly its commanding position, I must call your attention to another remarkable fact in the geography of New York. The hills on either side of the Mohawk gradually rise up to elevations which pour from their outward, or Northern and Southern slopes, the sources of great rivers which traverse other States. The waters which drain from our territories, flow by the principal commercial cities of the Union. From Northern New York, they run into Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence, passing by Montreal and Quebec; by the Hudson, which is exclusively a river of our State, into the Harbor of New York; from its south-east section into the Delaware, past

Philadelphia into the Delaware bay; by the Susquehanna past Baltimore into the Chesapeake; by the sources of the Allegany into the Ohio, past Cincinnati and New Orleans, into the Gulf of Mexico.* Thus our State enjoys the apparently inconsistent advantages of having the deepest channels for commerce with the west, and at the same time, of being at the head of the great valleys of the United States. This is not a fact of mere geographical interest. It gives us substantial advantages. It enables us to penetrate with our Canals and Railroads into all parts of the country, by following the easy and natural routes of rivers. We can go into twenty States and into two-thirds of the territories of the Union, without leaving the courses of valleys. No other Atlantic State can make a communication between its Eastern and Western borders without overcoming one or more mountain ridges. Thus, then, are we situated. One angle of New York rests upon the Atlantic, another reaches North to the St. Lawrence, while the third stretches West to the great lakes and the valleys and streams connected with the Mississippi. We are placed at the heads of the great valleys, while the Mohawk and the Hudson unite them all and give us command of the commerce of our country.

I have particularly described the valleys of the upper and lower Hudson and of the Mohawk, and of the great rivers which flow from our territories, on account of their commercial importance, their historical

* A single Railroad (the New York and Erie) touches, at Dunkirk, the waters which discharge into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and crosses in its course all of the divergent streams I have mentioned.

interest and their physical peculiarities, and also because they will continue to influence the fortunes of our country. They will ever be the pathways for great events.

When our continent was discovered, the plains of the Mohawk and of western New York, were held by a confederacy of Indians, who had subdued the country from north of the great lakes to Georgia, and from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. While their conquests were due in some degree to their bravery in war, yet they owed much to the geographical peculiarities I have described, which gave them easy communications between themselves and avenues which led into the countries of their enemies. Mountain ranges divided their foes into different communities, while they were able to pour their united forces through the valleys I have mentioned. They held in subjection numbers far greater than their own, because they could attack and subdue isolated tribes. Their war paths led along the Hudson, the Delaware, the Susquehanna, and the Allegany, and the margins of the great lakes. Nature marked out for them the same strategy which Napoleon used with such wonderful success, that of maintaining a compact force, of dividing his enemies and bringing the greater power to bear upon the point of attack. That the Iroquois understood the value of union, is shown by their confederacy; that they appreciated the importance of their geographical position is proved by the figure of speech by which it was designated. It was called the "long house" or castle, and the different tribes were made guardians of its outlets and defences. The

Senecas in western New York were the keepers of the great western gate which led into the valley of the Mississippi, and the Mohawks, the fiercest and most powerful clan, the keepers of the eastern door or gate from which they issued to conquer the Algonquins in Canada, or the Mohicans and other tribes of New England.

After the discovery of this Continent and its settlement by Europeans, the wars and national animosities of France and England were transferred to America. In this remote part of the earth, far away from the observation of the world, in the deep recesses of the forests, a bloody and protracted warfare was waged. In its struggles, some of the most heroic spirits of the day were engaged. We find that armies followed the track of the war path, and the Mohawk and upper Hudson were the scenes of their conflicts. The ferocity of this contest, and the numbers engaged, in a region so sequestered and wild, were remarkable. Both nations, looking upon these valleys as the keys to the whole country, strove for their possession. Every effort of diplomacy was made to gain the alliance of the Five Nations, and for a long time with varied success. The French established a colony at Onondaga. In 1690, a party of French and Indians burned Schenectady. In 1755, a bloody battle was fought at Lake George, between the French under Baron Dieskau, and the Indians and Colonists, under Sir William Johnson. In 1756, Montcalm with nine thousand men captured Fort William Henry on the same lake, and his savage allies massacred fifteen hundred of its garrison. General Abercrombie, with

an army of sixteen thousand men, passed through Lake George with a fleet of more than one thousand boats, and made a desperate but unsuccessful attack on the French at Ticonderoga. His loss was more than two thousand killed, among whom was Lord Howe, one of the most chivalrous and heroic men of the British army. As a part of the same campaign, Fort Stanwix was built at Rome, and an expedition was planned against Canada by way of Oswego. In 1757, Lord Chatham, determined to expel the French from this continent, placed Lord Amherst at the head of an army of fifty thousand men, a greater force than was employed against us at any time during the revolutionary war. One division under Prideaux, was sent up the valley of the Mohawk to western New York, another under Wolfe up the St. Lawrence, while the main body under Amherst, moved through the valley of the upper Hudson, through Lake George and Lake Champlain, to Canada, where the concentration of forces was to complete the conquest of that province. This campaign ended in the capture of Quebec, the dramatic deaths of the rival heroes Wolfe and Montcalm, and the extinction of the French power on this portion of the continent. The expenses of that war constitute a large item in the present national debt of Great Britain. More than ten millions of dollars were spent in fortifying Crown Point, although that fortress was never completed.

When the Revolutionary contest began, these valleys, which had been the scenes of Indian warfare, and the equally savage contest between the British and the French, immediately became the theatre of a

continued and bloody struggle. The whole region of the Mohawk was plunged into a civil war of the most ruthless character. The first capture of British arms and prisoners was made by Ethan Allen at Ticonderoga, and the first naval battle of the Revolution, fought by Arnold on Lake Champlain. Knowing that the control of the Hudson would divide and destroy the power of the patriots, our enemies attempted to secure its possession. General Burgoyne, with his disciplined army, came down the valley of the upper Hudson. Lord Howe and Sir Henry Clinton, with a fleet, were to sail up that river, while St. Leger, with Indian forces, entered the valley of the Mohawk at Rome. Through these accustomed pathways of war, our State was assailed at once by the naval power, the disciplined armies, and the savage allies of the British empire. The defeat of the latter at Rome, and the surrender of Burgoyne, baffled this great combined movement, the most formidable made against our liberties. The battle of Saratoga achieved the freedom of our country. It gained us the alliance of France, and substantially terminated the contest. In our last war with Great Britain, she acted upon the same idea of getting possession of these great avenues of this State, and thus dividing the power of our country. It was hoped, if thus separated from the rest of the Union, the inhabitants of New-England would not be unwilling to renew their allegiance to the British Crown. Her army, aided by her fleet, entered Northern New-York by Lake Champlain. Attacks were made upon Sacketts Harbor, designed to reach the valley of the Mohawk. The victories of Macomb

and McDonough defeated the hopes of our enemies at home and abroad, and terminated this last effort to concentrate hostile armies at the capital of our State.

Since the invasion of the French from Canada, in 1665, under De Courcelles, that part of New-York lying along Lake Champlain and the upper Hudson has been the field of strife and blood in fifteen campaigns. [See Elements of Military Art and Science, by H. Wager Halleck.] An equal if not greater number of military expeditions or savage forays have been directed against its Western and Ontario borders, the valley of the Mohawk, and the head waters of the Susquehanna. The lower Hudson was the perpetual seat of war, during the Revolution. There is no part of our State which has not suffered from the contests of disciplined armies, or from the horrors of the torch and the scalping knife, in the hands of infuriated savages. New-York has been the battle-field of our country.

I have not stopped, in this hasty recital, to call your attention to any of those circumstances which in such prolonged and varied contests have filled every part of New-York with histories of battles and traditions of personal bravery and suffering. Hereafter, they will afford fruitful themes for the historian, the novelist, and the poet. My purpose is to illustrate the remarkable position held by our State.

These occurrences have thus followed in the same channels, not for casual but for enduring causes. The influences of these valleys have not been confined to guiding the tracks of war. Where war-paths led through deep forests; where the standards of France

were borne by chivalrous warriors; where armies marched in their assaults upon our liberties; where, at a later day, our own citizens went forth to meet the enemies of our country, you will now find the great avenues of commerce. They are crowded with vessels laden with the fruits of our soil; supplying the wants not only of our own, but foreign lands. France and England are now looking to this country, which they have enriched with their blood, for the bread to feed their armies in the remote Crimea. Through these valleys greater armies than Europe can send forth to battle, are borne, not to violent deaths or lingering disease, but to homes on the fertile plains of the West. Once they were the paths of war; to-day they are trod by the armies of peace. Look at the products carried through these channels of commerce; trace back their transportation through great lakes, up winding rivers, or across vast plains, to the fields upon which they were tilled; think of the toil bestowed upon them, the thousand hopes and fears, of pleasures and of sorrows, with which they are associated, and which yet cling to them in their course through our State; and you will feel that the drama of life as here presented in emigration or commerce, is not of less dignity than the pomp and circumstance of war.

The physical peculiarities of our State have had much to do with the first settlement of New-York; with the character of its people; with the foundations of its society; with the development of statutory and constitutional law, and its influence over the policy of our whole country. Our commercial advantages brought us a cosmopolitan population from the outset. Com-

merce, the great agent of civilization, gave us, from the first, the best principles of government and of social and religious liberty then known to the world. The report by Hendrick Hudson of the character of the bay and river he had discovered, led to its immediate settlement by the most heroic, intelligent and enterprising people of the age. The principles of the Dutch made Holland the asylum of those who fled from religious or political persecution. Their liberal views were imparted to the colonies they founded. By drawing to their settlements here, all nationalities and creeds, they made that toleration a law of necessity which at first was a measure of wise and humane policy. The world has never witnessed a scene of greater moral beauty than the Bay of New-York presented under the Dutch government, and at a later day, while its just views of liberty continued to influence the community it had founded. At a period when rights of conscience were not recognized in Europe, save in the limited territories of Holland, there were clustering around the beautiful harbor of New Amsterdam communities representing different nationalities and creeds, living in peaceful intercourse. The Hollanders and Swedes at Manhattan, the Waldenses upon Staten Island, the Walloons and English upon Long Island, and the Huguenots upon the banks of the Hudson, found here a refuge from religious persecution. What civilized Europe denied them, they sought on this spot, still shaded by primeval forests, and still made picturesque by the gliding canoe of the savage. These exiles from Piedmont, from France, from the banks of the Rhine, and from Britain, lived here in

peaceful concord as strongly in contrast with the bigotry and intolerance which prevailed elsewhere, as was their civilization and refinement to the wild scenes and savage tribes who surrounded them. At a later day, the persecuted Germans from the Palatinate were settled on the Mohawk. A colony of Scotch Highlanders, banished for their attachment to the Catholic religion, and to the romantic fortunes of Charles Edward, found a home, not unlike their native hills and lakes, in the northern part of Montgomery county. The Protestant Irish established themselves in Otsego county, and there were settlements of French in Northern and Western New-York. A small colony of Spaniards once existed near Onondaga Lake, but were destroyed by the Indians. The Welsh came to this country soon after the Revolution. Almost every European tongue has ever been spoken at the firesides of our State, and used on each returning Sabbath in offerings of prayer and praise to the God of all languages and all climes.

Nine names, prominent in the early history of New York and of the Union, represent the same number of nationalities. Schuyler was of Holland; Herkimer, of German; Jay, of French; Livingston, of Scotch; Clinton, of Irish; Morris, of Welsh; and Hoffman, of Swedish descent. Hamilton was born in one of the English West India Islands, and Baron Steuben, who became a citizen of New-York after the close of the Revolutionary war, and who was buried in Oneida county, was a Prussian.

As this was originally a Dutch colony, the character of that people, and their influence upon our institutions,

demand particular notice. These colonists came here in the heroic age of Holland. She had then asserted and maintained her national independence in an unequal contest of eighty years' duration against the colossal power of Spain, which, under Charles the Vth and his immediate successors, overshadowed and threatened the liberties of all Europe. This war with Spain excited the admiration of the world. It should also excite its gratitude. It was a contest for civil and religious liberty in behalf of mankind. After the close of this struggle, Holland battled single handed against the combined powers of France and England. It was the age in which she produced Maurice, the greatest warrior of his times; De Ruyter and Tromp, the ablest naval commanders; Grotius, who is yet authority on international law; and Barneveldt and the De Witts, the purest and most skillful statesmen. Twice in a century her people let the sea cover their land rather than it should be occupied by tyrannical oppressors. Such was their love for knowledge, that when the Republic wished to reward the citizens of Leyden for their heroic defence of their town, they chose an institution of learning rather than commercial advantages, to perpetuate the remembrance of their patriotism. We should be proud that we derive so many of our political principles from this people. Nor is the debt of gratitude a local one. Holland was the asylum for the persecuted Puritans. It taught them the advantages of a republican form of government. Our obligations are broader than this—they are national. Constitutional liberty was introduced into Great Britain by the revolution which placed upon the

British throne the Prince of Orange, who had recently commanded the armies of Holland against those of England. The accession of the Dutch monarch essentially modified the character of the British government, and invigorated sentiments of freedom in all of her colonies.

The influences exerted by the first American colonists upon the history and character of our people, involve inquiries of great interest, which throw light upon the principles of our institutions, and upon questions which even at this time agitate the public mind. Their discussion at times has excited feeling where there should be none. As a descendant of the Pilgrims, and a native of New-York, I can speak upon this subject without partialities. We can clearly trace the influence of the Hollander and the Puritan upon the course of public affairs in our country. I select these two emigrations, for they represent conflicting views of constitutional and legislative policies. The Puritan colonists have been the objects of indiscriminate ridicule, and of equally indiscriminate praise; yet their characters and views are clearly defined in their own transactions and histories. They had been engaged in long and bitter controversies. Those who came after the execution of Charles the Ist, had been involved in a civil war envenomed by religious prejudices. It was a contest in which there were no compromisers. In their successes, they had conceded no toleration—in their defeats, they received none. They fought to establish a religious power not only for their own advantage, but for the control of others. Defeated in this struggle, they withdrew to the wilderness on this

side of the Atlantic, sternly brooding over their defeats. They were made gloomy by the belief that they were contending not only against men, but against spiritual foes in bodily forms, and they fenced themselves round with a charmed circle of austerities. They wished to be let alone in their remote retreats, and they resisted what they deemed the intrusions of heresy. They made no pretences to the views of religious toleration now claimed for them. Their government was partially a theocracy. They believed the Quakers were heretics, and they were banished; they believed that some were in intercourse with the evil spirits, and they were burned; † they could not understand the principles of religious freedom advocated by Roger Williams, and they drove him out of the land. They persecuted others as they had been persecuted. They were made harsh by suffering and sacrifices. But this is the dark side of their character. They were vigorous and self-reliant. A common poverty destroyed distinctions of rank. None were rich enough to establish the manorial estates or privileges which were created in New York. They were industrious and enterprising. Their religious doctrines led them to value education as a means of spiritual and intellectual improvement. As they

† NOTE.—“The mischief wrought by this delusion was wide spread and terrible. Society was paralyzed with alarm. Evil spirits were thought to overshadow the land. When the Royal Veto arrived, twenty persons had been executed, fifty-five had been tortured or terrified into a confession of witchcraft, one hundred and fifty were in prison, and two hundred more had been accused.”—(*Page 447, 1st Vol. of Lossing’s Field Book of the Revolution.*) At this time, the population of the colony was small. The Statutes of Massachusetts against witchcraft, and its sumptuary and pragmatic laws, are in striking contrast with the enlightened legislation of New Netherlands.

spoke a common language, education was rapidly spread throughout the community. Under these influences the individuals became superior to the spirit of their laws. None do so much injury to their characters as those who, with bad taste, try to soften their stern aspects with inconsistent adornments and graces, or, with still worse logic, insist that they had principles of toleration with practices of persecution. Let them alone, in their clear and decided characters, as men of robust virtues and grave faults. Let the circumstances of their history excuse their wrong doings. From them we get many virtues and advantages; we get elsewhere our best conceptions of civil and religious liberty.

The colony of New-York, in its leading features, was the reverse of that of Massachusetts. I have alluded to the character of the Dutch people of the 17th century. The Hollanders not only tolerated, but invited different nationalities and creeds to their new settlement. More enlightened than their age, they had made great advances in civil and religious liberty. They rejoiced in the cosmopolitan character of their inhabitants. The rebuke given by the Directors to one of their Governors, who was inclined to persecute the Quakers, is a clear and beautiful illustration of their sentiments:—"Let every one remain free as long as he is modest, moderate, his political conduct irreproachable, and as long as he does not offend others or oppose the government. This maxim of moderation has always been the guide of our magistrates in this city, (Amsterdam,) and the consequence has been that people have flocked from every land to this

Asylum. Tread, then, in their steps, and we doubt not you will be blest."

It needs no argument to show where religious freedom was most respected. The Walloons, the Waldenses, the Huguenots, and many from the eastern colonies,* flying from persecution and clustering around the harbor of New-York, mark the spot where liberty and toleration were presented in their most attractive aspects. It requires no discussion to prove whence we get our best ideas of constitutional and commercial law and municipal freedom. Not from England, depressed by the tyranny of the Plantagenets, the Tudors and the Stuarts, for long centuries down to the period of the settlement of this country; but from republican Holland, the "Venice of the North," the "Queen of the Seas," who, while struggling against the power of Spain, "grasped the commerce of the world, and made it to supply the means to wage her unequal war with tyranny and wrong." On the other hand, the vigor of character, the appreciation of education and religion derived from the Puritans, are manifested in every quarter of our land; in public and

* The historian DeLaet says that numbers, nay, whole towns, to escape from the insupportable government of some of the New England colonies, removed to New Netherland to enjoy that liberty denied them by their own countrymen. Throg's Neck, in Westchester county, was settled by Throgmorton, and thirty-five families which were driven from Massachusetts with Roger Williams. Gravesend, on Long Island, was founded by Lady Moody and her followers, who for the same reason sought shelter under the liberal government of New Netherland. So many of this class came here, that, to prevent the disturbance of harmony and social intercourse by the incoming of so many strangers to reside here, an English secretary to the Council was appointed. As the early immigrants from New England were induced to come here by the superiority of our laws, they were active supporters of intelligent and liberal legislation.

private enterprises. Our people required and possess the characteristics derived from both of these sources. He who would seek to deprive the Hollanders or the Puritans of their just share of veneration, is unworthy to be the descendant of either.

The Dutch had, then, a republican government. Our great political maxims were recognized there. "Unity makes might" was a motto, and "taxation only by consent" a principle. They originated the vital principles of our institutions—municipal and township organizations, and the great conception of local self-government. While the views and practices of government of the first settlers of this State were so superior to those of the New England colonies, there were causes which made the former less intelligent as a people. Their clergy and teachers were learned men, and academies were established at an early day; but this learning was lost when the English language was generally used. The diversities of nationalities and tongues in this colony were unfavorable to the dissemination of learning, as each people required distinct teachers and systems of education. The most unfavorable influence was the creation of large estates by grants from the government, which were commenced by the Dutch and continued by the English authorities. This practice created a class of tenants, or compelled the colonists to buy their lands of the large owners; it also made great social distinctions and was injurious to the people. Although their principles of government were superior to those of New England, the mass of the people was thus made less active and enterprising. It is remarkable how enduring the in-

fluences of these facts have been. The population of New-York and New England are about equal. If you go to the Western States, you will find a large share of its enterprises in the hands of emigrants from New England, while the political institutions are moulded after New-York; you will find the enterprise and mechanical skill with the former, while the judiciary of this State is everywhere recognized as controlling in legal questions. Our judges settle principles of jurisprudence for two thirds of the Union.

The influence New-York has exercised over the constitutional history of our country, is owing to the superiority of its political principles during the colonial and revolutionary eras. The United States of the Netherlands presented all the leading features of the United States of America, although their adjustments were less perfect. It was a Republic made up of several distinct communities, united for common defence, but retaining rights of separate self-government; its government was representative. Its great leading feature was its municipal corporations and subdivisions in the nature of townships, with rights of local legislation. Acting upon this principle in our own State, the several towns manage their own affairs: our boards of Supervisors transact the business of the counties, the legislatures make laws concerning the Sovereign States, while the general government is invested with powers and restrained by limitations which only give it jurisdiction in matters of national defence, dignity or importance. It is this system which secures the good government of every part of our country. It has been the growing appreciation

of its value which has constantly carried jurisdiction from general to local tribunals. The higher governments have been made less powerful and less liable to become injurious from corruption or ambition, by giving legislative rights to the more humble, economical and safer control of town and county officers. The germ of this principle existed in the government of the United Provinces; its full exposition has only been seen in this country; and its value and importance shown on the broad theatre of our land, where it has preserved the integrity of our Union, and disappointed the hopes or predictions of those who foretold its early dissolution as a necessary consequence of its expansion. The Dutch principle of "No taxation without consent," lay at the foundation of our Revolution; and their motto that "Unity makes might," taught us how to uphold that principle; and its municipal corporations and its local legislatures were the types of our political institutions.

Not only were the colonists of New-York imbued with sentiments of freedom, but they had the earliest and most urgent occasions to assert them. Living without the protection of a charter, for a long time under the control of the private ownership of the Dutch West India Company and of the Duke of York, amid the unfavorable influences of great seigniories, as early as 1690 they boldly claimed their legislative rights, and resisted "Taxation without consent." The contests with the Royal Governor were conducted on the part of the colonists with signal ability, and their protests and arguments were pronounced by Attorney General Randolph, of Virginia, to be the ablest expo-

sitions of the rights of popular representatives. These controversies involved a wide range of discussion, and thoroughly instructed the people of the colony in the principles of constitutional liberty. The contest which commenced in New-York, between its legislatures and the Royal Governors, extended to other colonies, and excited the public mind from time to time until the era of the Revolution. The whole of the American people were then united against the aggressions of the Crown. The resolutions of the New-York Assembly against the stamp act were drawn up with consummate ability, and, to use the language of Pitkin, "breathed a spirit more bold and decided than those from any other colony." In 1754, a convention of delegates from the several colonies, held in the capital of our State, which was attended by Benjamin Franklin and other eminent men, drew up a plan for colonial union for protection against the French and Indians. This proposition prepared the minds of the American people for a similar measure to resist British tyranny, and most appropriately the motto of Holland that "Unity makes might," was first acted upon in the city she had founded. In 1775, a provincial congress assembled in the city of New-York, and was the first of those illustrious councils, which, in the language of Lord Chatham, "With solidity of reasoning, force of sagacity, and wisdom of conclusion, ascertained, vindicated and established the liberties of America."

I shall not dwell upon the Revolutionary contest. In its progress, it carried war and desolation into different sections of our country. Elsewhere, it swept like the tornado in its course, but its visitations, while

destructive, were temporary. In this State, its thunders never ceased, its baleful fires were never quenched, during the whole struggle. On the Mohawk, it was attended with all the horrors of civil war, made more revolting and terrible by savage barbarities. The whole length of this gentle valley was desolated by the sword and bayonet, the torch and tomahawk.

When it was determined to sever our connexion with Great Britain, Congress recommended the formation of governments in all the colonies, equal to the demands of their new independence. All of the States save two followed the recommendation. The constitution formed in New-York, amid the confusion of the Revolution, is a proof of the profound knowledge of its leading men in the principles of civil liberty, good government and constitutional law. Its superiority was universally admitted, and it was received with great favor, not only in the State, but elsewhere. "Our constitution," says Jay, in a letter to the President of the convention, "is universally approved, even in New England, where few New-York productions have credit." [See Hon. B. F. Butler's Address before the New-York Historical Society.]

All of the State constitutions recognized in express terms the natural and absolute right of every man to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, yet the constitutions of New-York and Virginia alone were free from provisions repugnant to these declarations.

Great injustice has been done to the early instrumentality of New-York in the cause of American independence. The peculiar situation of the Province—

without a charter, the arbitrary conduct of many of the Royal Governors, the questions growing out of their acts and pretensions—compelled the people of this State to place themselves, from the beginning, on the high grounds of natural and inherent rights. Elsewhere these contests frequently grew out of questions about the construction of charters.

Still greater injustice has been done to the services of the early statesmen of New-York in the formation of our national constitution, and in the tone of construction given to that instrument, when our government was first organized. I have shown why they were well trained in the great principles of government; that they drew their sentiments from the best sources, the only free and republican government then existing. When the independence of the colonies was achieved by the common patriotism of our countrymen, a greater task remained to be done. The confederation was temporary in its character, and insufficient for a bond of union when the outward pressure of war was withdrawn. We occupied a vast country, which presented a great variety of climate and condition. There was no power to coerce these conflicting interests. To reconcile them appeared impossible. To dissolve again into the original separate communities involved wars, standing armies, and the weakness which would make us a prey to European nations. It was then almost universally assumed that the strength of a government depended upon the amount of its privileges and the extent of its jurisdiction. The European statesmen declared we could not create a government with power enough to make it

stable, which would not in its action, trample on some of the varied interests of our land. Out of Holland, there were no clear conceptions of a government which was not the source of power, instead of being its recipient from the mass of the people. The United Provinces of the Netherlands were so limited in extent and so homogeneous in character, that they afforded no clear rule for our action. Under these circumstances, the duty of forming a government was entered upon by the patriots of our country. In the convention which framed it, two great antagonistic ideas were at once developed, and they have, under different phases, divided the public mind from that day to this. On the one hand it was held, that to make a government strong and enduring, it should have a large amount of jurisdiction; that its strength and endurance would be determined by the extent of its power. The opposing party held, that the strength and permanency of government grew out of limitations of authority, restraining it from acting upon questions which would bring it into conflict with the views of different sections of our broad land. They also held that the most beneficent legislation would be secured by such distribution of political power, that different localities should direct those affairs which most concerned their own interests and happiness. These considerations were connected with the principle of representation. If it was to be a government of great jurisdiction, it was a matter of deep concern to know who would direct it. It was urged by some that representation should be graduated by population. This would give control to a few large States. It was con-

tended by others that the several States were sovereignties standing upon equal grounds, and therefore entitled to equal voices in the common government. That this was the only security against the centralization of political power. The three great States of Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts, insisted upon representations in the Senate and House of Representatives in proportion to population. New-York, alone, of the large States, declared that she did not ask nor would she take a representation in either branch of the National Legislature beyond what was allowed to the feeblest member in the confederacy. To my mind, this forms the noblest passage in the history of our State. Her future greatness was then apparent, yet she had the magnanimity to rise above the temptations of power, and the superior wisdom to see the necessity of forming a government of limited jurisdiction, and of upholding local sovereignties. When this principle of perfect equality was invaded in the formation of the House of Representatives, the majority of her delegates withdrew from the convention, and this State, for a long time, refused to ratify the constitution, and only yielded its ultimate assent upon the express understanding that it should be so amended that doubtful or implied powers would be cut off. The noble and resolute stand taken by New-York induced the national convention to limit the authority of Congress. It also did much to secure amendments to the constitution which contain guarantees of the rights of the states and the liberties of the citizen. It was New-York that took the foremost stand in favor of State rights and local self-government; those

vital principles of our political system which baffled the predictions of European statesmen, that the original thirteen states could not be held together under one government. Principles which to this day bind together our land, although it has extended threefold, until it is as broad as all Europe.

Questions relative to the authority which governments ought to possess, have entered largely into our political discussions. I can say, without touching upon partisan grounds, that the policy of decentralization of political power has constantly gained favor with the American people. It is generally supposed this doctrine had its origin in Virginia. The delegates from that State in the national convention, contended for large grants of authority to the general government.

It has been truthfully said that the wisdom of our institutions exceeds the wisdom of their founders. They established principles of more scope and influence than their authors foresaw. The germ of the Township system existed in Holland, was introduced from thence, and perfected here by causes independent of the political sagacity of our fathers. The condition of our country is rapidly developing this policy. Equality of rank and the necessities of a thin population on the borders of a boundless wilderness, made all other arrangements unsuitable. It was most rapidly spread in New England, for the growth of her colonies was the most rapid. For this reason it has been supposed by many historians to be of New England origin. More correct investigations into governmental history, show that it was a feature in the government of Holland long before the

settlement of America. The relationships which that country bore to New Netherlands and to the pilgrims, entitle it to the honor of its introduction here. It is undoubtedly true that at first it was regarded merely as a convenient mode of conducting public affairs, and that it had no higher value in the minds of the early colonists. None foresaw its future importance. This system of local self-government keeps at home the mass of political power. It yields it to the remoter legislative bodies in diminishing proportion as they recede from the direct influence and action of the people; it does not regard the central government as the source of authority, from which it percolates in limited measures to the lower jurisdictions. The vital principle of self-government is not the mere demagogical idea that the people, in their collective capacity, are endowed with a wisdom, patriotism and virtue superior to their individual characters. On the contrary, the people as a society are as virtuous or as vicious, as intelligent or as ignorant, as brave or as cowardly, as the persons who compose it, and will always be viewed accordingly, by every straightforward man. The great theory of local self-government under which our country is expanding itself over our continent, without becoming weak by its extension, is founded upon these propositions. That government is most wise, which is in the hands of those best informed about the particular questions on which they legislate; most economical and honest, when in the hands of those most interested in preserving frugality and virtue; most strong, when it only exercises authority which is beneficial in its action to the gov-

erned. These are obvious truths, but how are they to be made available for practical purposes ? It is in this that the wisdom of our institutions consists. In their progress, they are developing truths in government which have not only disappointed the hopes of our enemies and dissipated the fears of our friends, but give promise in the future of such greatness and civilization as the world has never seen.

The legislation which most affects us is local in its character. The good order of society, the protection of our lives and our property, the promotion of religion and learning, the enforcement of statutes, or the upholding of the unwritten laws of just moral restraints, mainly depend upon the virtue and wisdom of the inhabitants of townships. Upon such questions, so far as they particularly concern themselves, the people of the town of Kirkland, in the county of Oneida, are more intelligent and more interested, than those outside of their limits can be for them. The wisest statesmen, living and acting at the city of Washington, cannot understand these affairs, nor can they conduct them as well as the citizens upon the ground. What is true of Kirkland, is true of the other ten thousand towns in the United States. When we shall have fifty thousand towns, this system of government will in no degree become overloaded nor complicated. There will be no more for each citizen to do than now. Our town officers in the aggregate are more important than congressmen or senators. Hence the importance to our government of religion, morality and education, which enlighten and purify the governed and the governor at the

same time, and which must ever constitute the best securities, both for the advancement and happiness of our country. The next organizations, in order and in importance, are boards of county officers, who control questions of a local character, but affecting more than the inhabitants of single towns. The people of the county of Oneida are more intelligent, and more interested in what concerns their own affairs, than any amount of wisdom, or of patriotism, outside of it. The aggregate transactions of our supervisors are more important than those of our State Legislature. When we have secured good government in towns and counties, most of the objects of good government are gained. In the ascending scale of rank, and in the descending scale of importance, is the Legislature, which is, or should be, limited to State affairs. Its greatest wisdom is shown by the smallest amount of legislation, and its strongest claims upon our gratitude grows out of what it does not do. Our general government is remarkable for being the reverse of every other system. Instead of being the source of authority, it only receives the remnant of power after all that concern town, county and state jurisdictions have been distributed. Its jurisdiction, although confined within narrow limits, is of great dignity, for it concerns our national honor, and provides for the national defence. We make this head of our system strong, by confining its action to those objects which are of general interest and value, and by preventing its interference with subjects upon which it cannot act with a due degree of intelligence. If our general government had the legislative power, which is now

divided between town, county and state jurisdiction, its attempts at their exercise would shiver it into atoms. If it was composed of the wisest and purest men the world ever saw, it could not understand all the varied interests of a land as wide as all Europe, and with as great a diversity of climate, soil, and social condition. The welfare of the several communities would be constantly sacrificed to the ignorance, the interests, or prejudices of those who had no direct interest in the laws they imposed upon others. Under our system of government, the right to interfere is less than the disposition many shew to meddle with what they do not understand; and over every section of our great country, there are local jurisdictions, familiar with their wants, and interested in doing what is for the right. It required seven centuries to reform palpable wrongs in enlightened Britain, simply because the powers of its government, concentrated in Parliament, were far removed from the sufferings and injuries those wrongs occasioned. Under our institutions, evils are at once removed, when intelligence and virtue have shown them in their true light to the communities in which they exist. As intelligence, virtue and religion are thus potential, let us rely upon them as the genial influences which will induce men to throw off the evils which encumber them, and not resort to impertinent meddling, howling denunciations, and bitter taunts, which prompt individuals and communities to draw the folds of wrong more closely about them.

The theory of local self government, is not founded upon the idea that the people are necessarily virtuous

and intelligent, but it attempts to distribute each particular power to those who have the greatest interest in its wise and faithful exercise. It gives to townships and counties and states, the right to direct their local affairs, because they are most intelligent about their own concerns. We know there are individuals wiser and better than the mass of these communities, but it acts upon the principle which governs us in private matters. When we are sick, we do not seek the wisest or the best man, but the wisest physician. If we wish to build, we do not look after the most learned man, but the most skilful mechanic. In the selection of agents, we choose those who are most interested in serving us faithfully. Acting upon these simple principles, the tendency of public opinion has constantly been in favor of taking power from central points, and distributing it to those who have the strongest motives, and the best intelligence for its judicious exercise.

This system not only secures good government for each locality, but it also brings home to each individual a sense of his rights and responsibilities; it elevates his character as a man; he is taught self reliance; he learns that the performance of his duty as a citizen is the best corrective for the evils of society, and is not led to place a vague, unfounded dependence upon legislative wisdom or inspirations. The principle of local and distributed jurisdiction, not only makes good government, but it also makes good manhood. Under European governments, but few feel that they can exert any influence upon public morals or affairs, but here, every one knows that his charac-

ter and conduct will at least affect the character and interests of the town in which he lives.

The conviction gains ground that the general government is strengthened and made most enduring, by lifting it above invidious duties, and making it the point, about which rally the affections and pride of the American people, as the exponent to the world at large, of our common power, dignity, and nationality.

The advancement of our State since the termination of the last war with Britain has been unparalleled. It was among the first to establish a permanent and comprehensive system of popular education. Our Judiciary has ever been distinguished for its learning and probity. The work of reconstructing the whole body of statutory laws, originated in this State, and its successful completion received the applause of the most distinguished statesmen of other countries. The first steamboat, of the many thousands which navigate the rivers or oceans of the world, was launched in our waters and floated upon the Hudson. The first canal for commerce in the United States, was made by its early enterprise. At this time, we have a connected line of artificial navigation, more than a thousand miles in length. The first link of the twenty-five thousand miles of railroad, which traverse the United States, was made by the public spirit of its citizens. Its numbers, which, at the close of the Revolution, were less than the present population of the counties of Oneida and Erie, then uninhabited save by savages, are to-day more than three millions. We are, by virtue of our population, position, and consti-

tutional rights, the foremost member of our Union.

My purpose in this imperfect sketch of New York, has been to point out its remarkable geographical position, to do justice to the first colonists, to vindicate the claims of its early statesmen to the gratitude of our whole country, and to call attention to the patriotism of its people.

Heretofore, our citizens have been unjust to the history of their State. While our brethren, in other portions of the Union, have, with becoming and patriotic pride, recorded the services of their ancestors, and have erected monuments to commemorate the great events which have occurred within their territories, we have been indifferent to the glorious annals of the past. We are more familiar with the early history of New England or Virginia than with our own. Their citizens have, with pious care, recorded the patriotic services of their fathers, and have rendered them familiar to the entire population of our Union. While I have, on this occasion, briefly attempted to present to your consideration, some of the prominent features in the history of our State, it must not be supposed that I desire to institute any invidious comparisons between New York and the other members of this glorious confederacy. I only wish to induce you to follow their example of proper reverence for the memory of their fathers. While a monument towers upon Bunker's Hill, exciting a just pride in the hearts of the citizens of Massachusetts, and respect in the minds of strangers, for the State where Freedom's battle was begun, why is it that no stone marks the spot upon the plains of Saratoga,

where Freedom's fight was won? Every schoolboy in our land is taught that the first blood in the Revolutionary struggle was shed at Concord; how many of our citizens know that the first surrender of a British flag or weapon was made at Ticonderoga? The traveler who sails through Long Island Sound, sees on the shores of Connecticut, the monument which tells of the massacre of brave patriots on the Heights of Groton. But what is there to remind him who passes through the valley of the Mohawk, of the thousands who were slaughtered by ruthless savages, during the French war and the Revolutionary contest? We have all been made familiar with the services which the statesmen of Virginia have rendered to the cause of civil liberty or constitutional law; while few are instructed that the earliest contests between the rights of the people and the pretended prerogatives of the crown, were commenced and most strenuously maintained by the popular delegates, in the colonial Legislatures of this State. The statesmen and the poets of New England strive to perpetuate the memories of the Pilgrim Fathers, to record their sufferings, and to hallow the very spots upon which they trod. Plymouth Rock has been made a sacred shrine where they annually pour forth their gratitude for the civil and political blessings which they enjoy. But, how little is known of the more varied, and more interesting emigration to the shores of our own state. While we honor the Pilgrim Fathers, let us not forget the Hollanders, who made earlier settlements upon our shores, who made the harbor of New-York a place of refuge from bigotry, intolerance and wrong.

The past is full of noble examples animating us with patriotic love of our state and nation, but we must not confine our attention to the past. The present and the future have their obligations. Our geographical position imposes upon us peculiar duties in our relations to the rest of the Union. The progress of our nation will lessen the comparative importance of other States, however important they may be. It will be otherwise with us. Commanding the great avenues of commerce, of intercourse, and of events, we grow with the growth of our country. It is our duty to emulate the patriotism of our Fathers; to maintain the rights of the several States; to preserve their Union, by confining the central government to the exercise of powers designed for the common dignity, defence and welfare; and to restrain those sectional passions and prejudices, which are apt to grow up in States, whose isolated positions do not give them the advantages we enjoy, of constant intercourse with the citizens of every part of our broad land.

In all that concerns New York, let us not only be mindful of the past, but in every thing that affects the education, morality, progress and patriotism of our State, be animated by the spirit of the motto emblazoned upon its shield—

EXCELSIOR.

NOTE.—The 1st volume of the History of New York, by J. R. Brodhead, Esq., is devoted to an account of events during the Dutch Administration. The thorough acquaintance of the Author with the early History of this State, has enabled him to make this part of his work interesting in the highest degree. His next volume will commence with the surrender of the colony to the British government.

A new Edition of the valuable History of New York, by Mr. O'Callaghan, will soon be given to the public. In addition to these works, we need a condensed History of this State, which should be illustrated by Mr. Lossing, after the manner of his “Field Book of the Revolution.”

I extract the following paragraphs from an eloquent address delivered by C. F. HOFFMAN, before the St. Nicholas Society, in 1847:—

“ Whether the French, after drawing their wonderful line of forts, which extended through the western wilderness from Quebec to New Orleans—whether they really ever hoped to cut a path to the Atlantic by the way of the Hudson, it is now difficult to say. But long previous to Leisles’s ill-starred attempt to expel them from Canada, and down to the period when Wolfe triumphed at Quebec, the old chronicles which record the formidable descent of Count Frontignac, the massacre of Schenectady, and other inroads of Hurons and Adirondacks, led on by French officers, tell us repeatedly of sudden taxes levied, and men warned to hold themselves ready in arms, even in the city of New York itself—so remote from the scene of the never-ending border strife.

“ The first really formidable inroad from ‘New France,’ as Canada was then called, was that of De Tracey, De Chaumont, and De Coureelles, in 1666, with twelve hundred French soldiers and one thousand Indians. De Barre’s descent with seventeen hundred men, followed in 1685. The burning of Schenectady in 1690, made their next attack memorable. In 1691, they were again within fifteen miles of Albany. In 1693, they were repulsed from Schenectady by Peter Schuyler. In 1695, three hundred of their soldiers made a lodgment at Oswego, while five hundred were driven out of New York by way of Lake Champlain.

“ In 1696, one of the best appointed armies that ever displayed upon this continent, an army led on by an array of Counts, Barons, and Chevaliers, with full battering train, complete camp equipage, and commissariat amply provided, penetrated as far as Onondaga Lake. The peace of Ryswick brought a breathing spell to the province. But in 1710 the old border struggle was renewed, and the province remained an armed camp till the peace of Utrecht in 1713. Again the province is in arms and marching upon the French at Niagara in 1727. And the enemy penetrated to Saratoga and cut off thirty families in a night in 1747.

The battle of Lake George, where Sir William Johnson won his spurs, and where eight hundred of the invaders, under Dieskau, were left dead upon the field, brings us to 1755. The assault of the Marquis of Montcalm on Fort Ontario, with four thousand troops, follows; and the massacre of Fort William and Henry, with the devastation of German Flats on the Mohawk, by the invaders, brings us to (1758) the duplicate battle of Lake George, when seventeen thousand men, under Abercrombie, were defeated by the French; the reduction of Fort Frontinac, on Lake Ontario, by three thousand provincials, the fight with the galleys on Lake Champlain, and the different affairs of Crown Point and Ticonderoga.

“ Within the seven years of the War for Independence, the battle of Long Island, the battle of White Plains, the storming of Stony Point, the affair of Fort Montgomery, the burning of Kingston, the sanguinary struggles of Cherry Valley and the Mohawk, with Oriskany, the bloodiest field of all our Revolutionary conflicts, and Saratoga the most glorious, crowd in with Niagara, Ticonderoga, and Crown Point, to mark their names yet again upon the blazing tablet of our military annals. And still once more, in 1814, the events at Fort Erie and Sackett’s Harbor, at Champlain, and Niagara, swell the records of fierce conflicts upon her soil, and approve New York the battle-field of the Union, the Flanders of American History.



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